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ABSTRACT

Factors are discussed which affect the role played by faculty in implementing legislation mandating that each of the Florida community colleges define the skills that must be mastered by students before transferring to a baccalaureate program. The report first presents a rationale for this mandate, based on the disproportionately high number of transfer students who drop out or earn failing grades at the Florida State Universities. After outlining the purview of the Essential Academic Skills project, the report presents four axiomatic conditions affecting community colleges. It then discusses the importance of released time, administrative support, and several other prerequisites to faculty participation in the reassessment of course goals and objectives necessitated by the basic skills requirement. The next sections call for a total faculty effort in the setting and enforcing of college-wide entry- and exit-level skills: for the development of a valid exam to measure student competencies: for remediation to fulfill the objectives of the test: and for faculty reassignments based on individual college needs. An outline follows of 14 attitudinal and institutional barriers to faculty cooperation and of corresponding strategies to be used in combatting them. The report concludes with a discussion of the implications of the mandate for terminal students and college autonomy. (JP)

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The Florida Association of Community Colleges

Presents

An Assessment of

The Impact of Defining Student Performance Standards

on the Climate of

Teaching and Learning

in

Florida's Community Colleges

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Abstract
A Rationale for Change

As recently as 1979, Florida's community colleges, using average grade point scores, have demonstrated parity with the universities in preparing students for upper-division academic programs. Yet, as the data is scrutinized, a startling spector undermines this comforting perception. Whereas on the upper range of a GPA chart community college students certainly do as well as the university's native students, on the chart's lower range (GPA less than 2.0) community college students outnumber native students three to one. Couple this fact with an individual assessment, college by college, and we discover that the range runs from a low of seven percent from one community college to a high of twenty-eight percent from another community college. In other words, whereas only seven percent of one community college's graduates did below "C" level work, another community college had twenty-eight percent of its graduates below "C" at the nine (9) state supported universities.

Compounding this situation is our community college upper-division dropout rate which, on an individual college by college analysis, ranges from a low of twelve percent to a high of forty-six. Compared to the native university students' dropout rate of fifteen percent, the community college system must confront this problem on a college by college basis.

The thrust of this report will be a defining of barriers and a discussion of strategies which may help individual community colleges to set realistic performance standards. Possibly the courage to enforce these basic skills standards may, ultimately, only be feasible under the aegis of statutory powers granted by the legislature, but the prevailing mood of the legislature, and it pervades all community college budgetary considerations, is that it is time for each individual community college to scrutinize the data pertaining to their college's graduates' performance and dropout rate in upper-division studies and to demonstrate, based upon their specific need, an intent to set and enforce a realistic set of basic skill standards.

INTRODUCTION TO PROJECT

In the spring of 1979, the Florida Legislature enacted CS/HB 1689 (Subsection 240.319 (3)(p)(q)(r) F.S.), a bill designed to improve the quality of postsecondary education in Florida. On June 23, 1979, the FACC/DOE Impact of Testing Project formed, and by December 1979 concluded that community college faculty viewed testing as having long term positive effects upon the communications and computations skills of graduates. In January 1980, the Essential Academic Skills Project convened and their interim report, published in June 1980, identified "those communications and mathematical skills which appear essential for students to possess as they complete their first two years of college and prepare to enter a baccalaureate program."

In the aftermath of this year of rather intensive study of the implications of CS/HB 1689 (Subsection 240.319 (3)(p)(q)(r) F.S.), the FACC, in combination with the DOE, has directed that a new study be undertaken.

THE MANDATE

Assess the Impact of Defining Student Performance Standards on the Climate of Teaching and Learning in Community Colleges in Florida.

1. Determine the readiness of individual faculty members to reassess course and program objectives.
2. Assess the program to date of individual faculty members' participation in the setting of program goals, individual course goals, and the establishment of student performance standards for individual courses as well as programs.
3. Assess the impact of establishing student performance standards on the following:
   a. Grading policies and practices,
   b. Instructor workloads and course assignments, and
   c. Instructor flexibility in terms of teaching methodologies.
4. Define those barriers that may interfere with individual faculty participation in operationalization of the necessary curriculum changes, and goal setting that may result from the establishment of student performance standards.
5. Suggest strategies and methodologies for individual faculty members that would aid in the definition of student performance standards in individual courses and programs.

These conditions appear to be axiomatic:

Axiom 1 - Community college faculties are not mobile with little or no new hiring. Thus, any reassessment of course or program objectives will have to be accomplished with present faculty.

Axiom 2 - Student populations statewide change unpredictably, but the previous rapid growth of the community college has stopped.

Axiom 3 - Faculty view testing for basic skills as having a long term positive effect upon the skills of graduates and are not threatened by a statewide testing program.

Axiom 4 - Any program change will impact upon enrollment.

Faculty Readiness to Reassess Course and Program Objectives:

It is the view of this committee that faculty members are very willing to reassess course and program objectives — if the need to reassess is demonstrated and if administrative support for that reassessment is forthcoming. Faculty members have a responsibility for instructing their classes while any reassessment takes place. Therefore, since reassessment becomes an additional duty, administrative encouragement, such as released time, S&PD grant, reduced workloads, and other such actions, should be a correlary to any faculty cooperation.

Administrative commitment to the results of reassessment must also be established. Too often professors devote extra hours to educational concerns at their colleges only to find their efforts ignored or, worse, used in ways not

intended. A climate of respect for the results of reassessment must be fostered before faculty members are asked to begin reviewing course and program goals.

Since any program change will impact upon enrollment, each institution should initiate an inquiry, possibly through a survey instrument, to determine this degree of impact. Thus, if faculty members are to be assigned different course loads due to enrollment shifts into developmental classes, inservice and/or released time to retrain should be provided.

The interim report of the State Level Task Force on Communications and Computations addresses only a part of our community college responsibility, those moving on to upper-division course work. Faculty members face a delicate instructional balance as they serve the varied needs of students. Before faculty members are asked to reassess course and program objectives, they need to identify the impact of Basic Skills Testing on the student population at their college.

Progress to Date of Faculty Participation in the Setting of Program Goals and Individual Course Goals:

Through the efforts of the Essential Academic Skills Project, faculty members are increasingly involved in individual efforts to define what essential skills are necessary for survival in their specific courses. Professors do instigate some course and program changes, but the future portends a total faculty effort, coordinated by a supportive administration, in the setting and enforcing of college-wide entry - and exit - level skills.

The Impact of Establishing Student Performance Standards on Grading Policies and Instructor Workloads and Flexibility:

Since grade inflation has obliterated the GPA as an effective measure of basic skill mastery, a valid exam designed to measure student competencies needs to be developed. This measurement should substitute for a course grade. Remediation designed to fulfill the objectives of that basic skills test should be developed.

If students do not have adequate skills to complete a course, instructor workloads will make faculty reassignment obligatory, according to the individual college need. As class loads adjust, faculty members must change in order to survive. As essential skills mastery is mandated, individual faculty members who are unable or unwilling to adjust will be rendered obsolete.

Faculty Participation: Barriers and Strategies

There are barriers to faculty participation in essential academic skills implementation. Strategies for overcoming these barriers are an exercise in futility unless a determination is made which clarifies the time frame for implementing the basic skills sections of CS/HB 1689 (Subsection 240.319 (3)(p)(q)(r) F.S.). At present, the time frame for fulfilling the legislature's intent remains nebulous.

BARRIERS that may interfere with individual faculty participation.	STRATEGIES and METHODOLOGIES.
a. Most widely-distributed statewide grade-point reports indicate that community college graduates do as well as native students during their upper division years; therefore, faculty are assured there is no need to reassess student performance standards or to change either programs or course methodologies.	a. There must be a realistic appraisal of student performance at the community college level and at the university level. Some evaluative instrument other than grades and quality point average should be developed as a measure.
b. Grade inflation, a well documented national phenomenon, has made the "B" an average grade with its implied connotation of "good" work. This in turn, forces many into the "excellent" category. With so many "A's" and "B's" being awarded at the term's end, students, their families, and the community see no need to have course objectives reassessed or changed, and may resist such change.	b. In addition to realistic grade appraisal, all courses should reinforce basic skills mastery.
c. The legislature has addressed the idea of basic skills assessment but has not realistically examined the full impact of funding such assessment.	c. Legislative funding should coincide with the expected results as expressed in CS/HB 1689 (Subsection 240.319 (3)(p)(q)(r) F.S.). Monies should be appropriated to fund the necessary changes, such as smaller classes, retraining of selected counselors, and retraining faculty.

d. Fearing enrollment loss and/or peer pressure, many faculty members tolerate a system of promoting students who attempt but do not achieve an exit standard.	d. Promotion and grades must reflect a student's achievement of performance competencies.
e. Their motives altruistic, many faculty members believe that disadvantaged students will benefit from being in college even though they do not meet performance standards.	e. Although a student's socialization while in college is not to be denegrated, adherence to performance standards must be mandated.
f. The universities have yet to demonstrate what levels of communications and computations skills are associated with successful performance in any upper division program.	f. The universities must research and document those patterns and levels of communications and computations skills which are associated with successful completion of all upper division programs.
g. Some colleges use a self-scored assessment test for entering students. This self-scored test results in scores which demonstrate little or no need for basic skill training for new enrollees. The answer to this paradox is that the students most in need of basic skill training do not return their tests or report their scores, and since there is no administrative mandate forcing students into basic skills classes, most refuse to enroll.	g. An assessment instrument must be developed to entry-test all students. A cut-off score must be set. Students scoring below this cut-off point must enroll in basic skills classes. Further, strong linkages with secondary schools, similar to the academic articulation linkages between the community colleges and the universities, should be developed.
h. At many community colleges courses outside the communications and math departments do not reinforce basic skills mastery in order to successfully complete those courses.	b. Emphasize that all courses reinforce basic skills mastery.

i. Historically, minority attitudes towards basic skills testing has been negative.	i. Minorities should be involved in all stages of basic skills test development.
j. In a sincere effort to fulfill the intent of CS/HB 1689 (Subsection 240.319 (3)(p)(q)(r) F.S.), many colleges statewide have already codified course and program objectives using language which, although soothing, defines absoutely nothing at all. These program guides, at the appropriate time, will be produced to demonstrate that reassessment of program and course objectives have already been accomplished.	j. Course and program objectives already written should be reassessed for clarity.
k. Administrative demands upon counselors in our community colleges create a situation wherein counselors often do not have daily contact with students.	k. Counselors should have workloads redistributed to allow more time to be spent with students.
l. Union contract definitions of faculity duties and assignments will make any transfer or reassignment of faculty tedious. In essence, a strong faculty union becomes a duplicate supervisory arm removed from the college's titled administration.	l. New strategies for cooperation between administration and unions must be developed to ameliorate problems relating to faculty reassignment.
m. Part-time faculty are often not apprised of the goals and missions of the college.	m. Part-time faculty should be included in any course or program reassessment.
n. Prospective community college teachers who are in the colleges of education in the State university system of Florida receive inadequate preparation to deal with community college students with basic skills deficiencies.	n. Colleges of education in the State university system must reevaluate and adjust their curriculum.

CONCLUSION

As the Essential Academic Skills Project moves to define basic skills and, in turn, quality of instruction, the role of the community college must be redefined. Since the inception of the statewide system, our students, their demands and the demands of the various levels of government have changed the community college mission. Most community college students will never receive a degree or move on to upper-division coursework. These students have objectives other than the traditional matriculation objectives. These objectives may be described as "value added" experience. Possibly there is a need for a degree which prepares students for an upper-division transfer experience and a second degree which certifies that the student's specific "value added" objectives have been met.

Yet, if Florida's community colleges fail to accept, based upon a school by school assessment, the responsibility for their graduates' basic skill mastery, a vacuum will ensue into which the legislature, in response to growing public dissatisfaction with the quality of graduates, must move. An unfortunate byproduct of this state involvement could be the creation of yet another bureaucracy removed from the daily, specific and individual problems each community college faces as it responds to the changing skill needs of it diverse student populations.

The dilemma between the individual community college's reluctance to risk displeasing a substantial portion of its clientele by testing, and the possible resulting loss in FTE, couples with the State's hesitancy to rupture the rather

fragile local control over course and program content that each community college presently enjoys. The paradox implicit in this delemma must be constantly before faculty and administration as we move into Phase II of the Essential Skills Project.

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